

TORNADOES

Tornadoes are violently rotating columns of air that descend from thunderstorm clouds and make contact with the ground. They typically develop when the right atmospheric ingredients come together, including warm, moist, unstable air near the surface; strong, atmospheric winds, increasing with height; and a nearby low pressure system to lift the air.

In Alabama, most tornadoes occur during two peak severe weather seasons. The spring severe weather season spans March, April, and May. The fall severe weather season includes November and early December. Tornadoes typically develop during the warmest part of the day, between noon and 8 pm. However, they can occur at any hour of the day or night, and during any month of the year (see graphs on page 17). Therefore, Alabamians are encouraged to be prepared when there is any potential for tornadoes.

Tornadoes have wind speeds that vary from as little as 65 mph to speeds over 200 mph. They move with the thunderstorms that produce them, with forward speeds ranging from nearly stationary to 70 mph. Most tornadoes travel from the southwest toward the northeast.

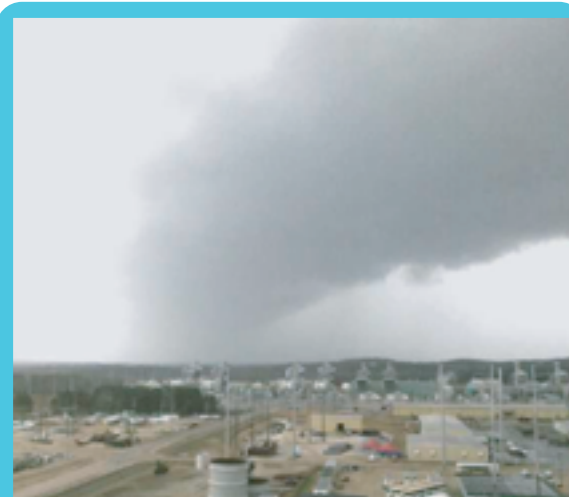


Photo Courtesy of Randolph County EMA. February 17, 2008.

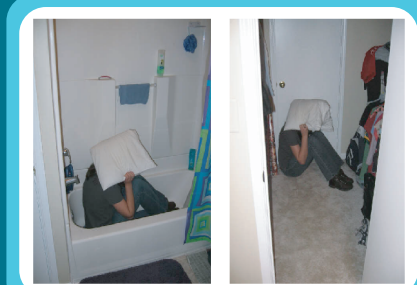
Remember, tornadoes form quickly! You may have only a few seconds to react and find shelter. When a tornado threatens, your immediate actions can save your life! Know what to do and where to go! Be Calm, Smart, and Safe.

Tornado Safety

In Homes or Small Buildings:

Go to the basement or a small interior room, such as a closet, bathroom, or interior hallway, on the lowest level. Get under something sturdy like a heavy table, if available. Protect yourself from flying debris with pillows, heavy coats, blankets, or quilts. Use bicycle or motorcycle helmets to protect your head.

Do not bother opening or closing windows and doors. This will not protect the structure, but only waste valuable time which may put yourself and possibly others at greater risk. Use those seconds to find a place of safety.



Community Storm Shelter in Vincent (Shelby Co.)
Photo courtesy of Shelby Co. EMA



Stay away from windows, doors, and outside walls!

In Mobile Homes or Vehicles:

Leave them and go to a strong building. If there is no shelter nearby, get into the nearest ditch, depression, or underground culvert and lie flat with your hands shielding your head.

In Schools, Nursing Homes, Hospitals, Factories, and Shopping Centers:

Go to the best available, predesignated, protective area. Basements are best, but interior locations on the lowest level also offer protection. Stay away from windows and other hazards inherent to the building.